

Homily010117

MARY: MOTHER OF GOD! MOTHER OF US ALL!  
IT'S A NEW YEAR!

She was fifteen years old, maybe sixteen. She was engaged to a man older than she; perhaps a widowed man with children. She experiences an apparition. An angel of the Lord appears with a very detailed message for her and a question. The message is that God is about to fulfill one of the oldest promises He had made. I will send a Messiah, of the House of David. She was not of the House of David but her intended was. And yet her intended was not to be the instrument of God in her conceiving the Messiah. She would be overshadowed, the angel said. By the very Spirit of God. What does that even mean? And more, what does that mean to a fifteen year old Jewish maiden in a backwater town of a few hundred people in the northern part of ancient Israel? Conceive without having relations? Is it even possible? What would Joseph think? Say? Do? What was his role to be? What about her parents? Her siblings? Would they believe her? Questions. All kinds of questions. Very few answers and very few details. That was the message.

And the angel's singular question? Will you agree? Will you give your "yes" in this moment for the rest of your life? No time to pray. No time to think. No time to seek counsel. An answer must be given. And an answer is given. "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say." She knew nothing of what awaited her. That Joseph would decide to break the engagement and then, after a dream, go through with the wedding. They would need to travel, he and she large with child to the town of his ancestors, Bethlehem. Where there would be no room. Only shepherds. And more Angels. Magi from the East. A threat to the child from the brutal Jewish King. Flight into Egypt to save the child's life. Then, after Herod the Great's death to return to Nazareth and live in obscurity for the next thirty years. Does any of this even make sense? If it is true that the conception and birth of Jesus of Nazareth, whom we believe to be the Incarnate Word of God made flesh, if that event is the most central and most pivotal moment in the history of the world, is this the best way for all of that to unfold? Is this God's design? What in the world is the Lord trying to convey to us in all of this by having it unfold this way?

In St. Paul's letter to the Christians in Galatia that we heard this morning, he says: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman to ransom us from our sins." There is a big debate today about whether or not ransoms should be paid to those (individuals or even states) who have kidnapped people and held them illegally. Different nations take different approaches. God's approach? God agreed to pay the ransom. To whom? Well who had kidnapped all the people but the evil one? Holding us in the realm of the dead, off limits to the God of Life, whose Son is the author of life. What is the amount of the ransom? The life of your beloved Son. Is that what really happened? Is that what was really going on two thousand years ago? Are we so precious to God, our Father that he would deliver his beloved into the corrupt hands of an evil fallen angel in order to rescue us all?

Did Mary understand any of this? No. Not then. But eventually she did. And now. Yes. But she trusted then, always she trusted. Always without seeing she trusted and she hoped. Even when she saw him hanging on that cross. Even when she was completely powerless to save him. Still she trusted, Still she gave her assent. It was all she had. It is all that any of us have. That is why it is so dear to our God that we make our gift of our "Yes." She was silent a lot. Because God reveals himself in the silence. That's why we are told to imitate her, keeping all the things that happen to us, treasuring them and reflecting on them in our hearts. In this new year we would do well to try to adjust our daily schedule and routine to allow for some daily quiet time to process the mystery of life we live, as Mary did.

Sometimes the things we harbor within us are the hurts and the rejections and the slights and the rudeness we encounter. We can brood over such injuries. But there is another way. Take some time each and every day to look for the signs of God's presence and the moments of grace that are a part of every day. Identify these moments and reflect on them in your heart. It is so much netter. So much more helpful. Even the difficult things have grace all around them. Wherever the shadow of the cross falls the treasury of available graces increases. That was Mary. That is Mary. That is why she is not only Mother of Jesus Christ the Son of God. That is why she is our Mother too. Imitating her is within our grasp. We have only to choose it. And if we practice it we become good at it. And then Hope grows. And joy. And blessings in abundance.